

No Pants Required: Parent Groups Gone Virtual

Hey New Parents!

Are you hanging in there? Barely? By a thread? That's real and we're here for you.

Becoming a parent is a ginormous journey even without any complicating factors, like...a pandemic, for instance. The experience can be really isolating. Maybe you're one of many new parents who is looking for ways to connect with other parents in a group setting. **And maybe you're a little unsure of what to expect from joining a group-gone-virtual.** I, for one, definitely associated Zoom with work webinars and not with a warm, welcoming space to bring my full, notsafe-for-work, I-freakin-need-help-now self.

The Nurture team was curious about this too, so we reached out to PEPS Community Connector and Group Leader, Jennie Capron and a few parents to learn more about what it's like to attend a virtual parent group.

When asked about the transition Jennie explained that the shift to online meetings wasn't completely seamless.

"At first... parents had some resistance to switching to virtual, but as folks adjusted to this change and we (PEPS leaders) increased our skills around supporting groups virtually, we've had lots of feedback that they appreciate that this is an option for them. Folks have said that this is way better than they thought it would be...some say that they would want to continue the option of virtual groups."

PEPS staff have helped their group leaders adapt to the new normal. Their leader training now includes guidance on facilitating a more natural conversation online, and the art of utilizing breakout rooms so that casual and intimate conversations can still take place.

What about the from parent perspective? *We should note, these parents are not necessarily PEPS group members, but participants from a variety of local groups.* New mom, Meera, was disappointed when her group, scheduled to kickoff in March, suddenly went online.

"I think it was actually easier to attend it virtually as a new parent with shifting feeding, napping, fussy baby rhythms. I was skeptical about a Zoom-based group but I actually really loved it and our group of moms built a strong and lasting connection."

Another new parent, Ella, just attended the first meeting of her group this week. **"The facilitator did a great job... just being able to hear from everyone in the group and tell our stories felt really good, there was a lot to connect on and relate to."**

Would these parents recommend a virtual parent group?

"I would say to absolutely give it a try, even if you are skeptical about making real connections virtually. The silver lining of virtual groups is that you can connect with other parents while doing all the baby care in an even more seamless way." -Meera

While a virtual meeting doesn't allow for an many cozy side conversations over tea, the virtual format could address some equity issues. As Jennie, our PEPS leader explains, **"This is an accessibility issue, too – with traumatic birth or health issues, it's easier to meet virtually."** Meeting virtually has the potential to eliminate a number of tasks and additional decisions a new parent, who's just entered a tremendous transition period, might need to face in order to get to an in-person meeting.

With many choices you can make on how to build your parenting support system, there are so many trade-offs. Whether a virtual meeting works for you depends on your own unique needs.